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frequent receptacles of avalanches of ice and snow from the superjacent mountains, presenting the rumbling sound and tremulous sensation of an earthquake, and forcing vast bodies of water over the precipice to make their way by the courses of the Amazon to the Atlantic ocean, a distance of five thousand miles.

STATED MEETING, SEPTEMBER 21, 1841.

VICE PRESIDENT MORTON in the Chair.

DONATIONS TO CABINET.

Mr. Ashmead presented the following specimens for the geological collection :

Bowlder of secondary limestone, containing many beautifully preserved *Cyrtocera*, *Orthocera*, &c., found on the northern shore of Lake Ontario.

Asaphus Wetherellii, (Green.)

Platynotus Boltoni, (Conrad.)

Fucoides Harlani, (Conrad.)

Cariocrinus ornatus, (Say,) and the tail of *Bumastus Barriensis*, (Murchison,) the head of a *Platynotus*, and several varieties of *Corallines*.

Chrystallized feldspar, from Rossie, New York.

A framed portrait of William Hembel, Esq., president of the society, painted by Mr. John Neagle, was presented by the following members:—Charles A. Poulson, Samuel George Morton, John P. Wetherill, William S. Vaux, George W. Carpenter, Thomas Fisher, Caspar W. Pennock, Alfred L. Elwyn, Henry F. Leib, Thomas Nuttall, Judah Dobson, Lardner Vanuxem, Robert Pearsall, Charles A. Poulson, Jr., Charles N. Bancker, Robert Bridges, James C. Booth, Paul B. Goddard, Joseph Carson, Thomas D. Mutter.

Mr. J. S. Phillips read the following paper on the Nomenclature of Natural Science.

The confusion in the nomenclature of Natural Science, owing to the number of synonymes with which it is burthened, makes it desirable that some fixed rule should prevail, by which naturalists might determine to whom to credit species, and what names shall have priority. With a view to call the attention of the Academy of Natural Sciences to the subject, I have thrown together some of the opinions and arguments urged by different parties, in the hope that eventually some definite rule in nomenclature may be generally adopted.

In determining the right to names of species, the only two points worth noticing, are, which description was first read before a society ; or, which was first printed and *published*.

Now, the arguments that occur to me in favour of priority of reading, are, that when the author has read his paper, and handed it over to the society before which he read it, he has done all in his power ; that it is then taken out of his hands, and he has no control over the time when it is to be published ; and, that, because his society, for whatever cause, delays the publication until another naturalist has published it, it would be unfair that the former should be deprived of the credit of his investigations, by circumstances over which he has no control, and that too, after having done all that was in his power.

Another reason urged in favour of the first read description is, that in referring to old descriptions, the date when the paper was read is precise—the day when read being always one of the meetings of the society, and printed in the journal or transactions with the date, and therefore absolutely determined ; but the actual day of publication not always so readily ascertained. In answer to the first, it may be urged, that if merely reading a paper secures the species, it will produce indifference as to whether it is ever published or not ; and naturalists in general will be at a loss to know what has been done in the case ; while specimens will remain unlabelled and unknown, because no one is particularly interested in publication ; but if priority of publication be the stand-

ard, other naturalists would not be long at a loss to know what has been done ; and as the rest of the community interested are a vast majority, their convenience should have great weight in the matter. And when the meetings are not open to the public, the reading is still less a point to be depended upon, as the committee to whom the paper is referred might retain it for months, and in some cases years, and in the mean time numerous species be added to the paper through the carelessness or connivance of the committee, a long time after it was read, and perhaps after another naturalist had published them ; and thus if the first read be the rule, a great opportunity for trick and injustice be offered to the unscrupulous. And even when the meetings are public, the author might borrow the paper under pretext of verbal alteration or other excuse, and then interpolate additional species. The same objections in part hold good against the other argument in favour of the first read description : the correctness of the date of publication may be ascertained by all, but it is not so certain that the description of a species was read on a particular evening.

The arguments in favour of priority of publication are, among others, that it would be extremely unfair, that a man who has spent months or years in searching for species abroad, and then perhaps been at the expense of publishing them himself, should be deprived of his hard-earned credit, by some one who has merely read a paper of which the other could have no knowledge ; while, if he had known that the Fauna or Flora of that district had been collected and described, he would have made his researches in another quarter.

Another reason is, that by making mere reading the standard, all who were not present at the time, or had access to the minutes of the society, might remain for a long time in ignorance ; especially as a paper might not be recorded until reported on by the committee, who might retain it for years when the volumes appeared at long intervals : even the members of the society who were absent when the paper was read, would remain at a loss to know whether any particular species were described or not. In this way the numerous specimens which are constantly scattered through various collections would remain a long time undescribed and

unknown ; as the possessors would be always in doubt, whether some one else had not previously described them without publishing : and thus the keeping up with the state of any department of natural history would be impossible, as no one could know what was doing in more than one or two societies. In the case of societies holding their meetings with closed doors, the reasoning applies with still greater force, as none but the members of that society could have the chance of any knowledge of the matter.

There is also another reason for preferring priority of publication ; that many naturalists are working away quietly, exploring sections of country around their places of residence, in remote and unfrequented parts, who have no access to public institutions, and whose only means of knowing what is done must be through the press.

The great number of synonymes with which natural science is burthened, is in great part owing to the want of a fixed rule in this matter ; and it would seem that priority of publication would lessen the evil, more than the rule of having been first read ; as several descriptions might be read within a short time of each other, in different places, by parties in ignorance of what is doing elsewhere ; and then their various names be introduced into the nomenclature ; but when once published, it is every one's business to know what has been described, as the opportunity is offered to every one to ascertain ; and if a description be made in voluntary ignorance, it then could not stand.

And not among the least of the arguments in favour of priority of publication, is, that of the two parties in the case, the describer, and the public of naturalists who are to read the description, the latter, being an immense majority, would find priority of publication contribute greatly to the interest of science generally, in promoting early publication, and preventing confusion by synonymy ; and to individual convenience, in enabling those who choose, to keep close up with the state of any branch of natural history. Now, as the descriptions would not be written, if there were to be no readers, the latter being so important a party in the matter, may take upon themselves to decide what rule shall obtain in the premises.

While on the subject of the nomenclature of natural history, there is an evil which is growing so rapidly as to deserve notice:

That is, the custom when genera are sub-divided, or species transposed from one genus to another, to credit the old species to the naturalist who constitutes the new, or even modifies the name of an old genus; thus depriving the original describer of his species, because it is associated with another series of species, or because the termination of its latin name be altered to suit the altered gender of the genus. In this way Linneus has been robbed of a large portion of his labours; not by Lamarck, for he appears to have been superior to such littleness; but by later naturalists, who have credited the old species of Linnæus, to Lamarck as an authority and precedent for their own innovations and appropriations. When fairly viewed, it can hardly fail to strike every disinterested mind, that the credit of the original description of a species should remain with the describer; he described the characters of a group, a species, and whether that species belongs to one or another genus, his description of its character must remain: indeed there is no show of any attempt to change such description; and if in the progress of science, new divisions of genera, or translations of species from one genus to another be found necessary; then credit the generic change to the constituter of the genus, and the species to its original describer, thus *Planorbis Corneus*. Lin. Lam. This, besides being strictly just to all parties, would have the effect of preventing useless and absurd modifications, by removing one of the chief incentives—the having the name of the innovator tacked to specific names.

MEETING FOR BUSINESS, SEPTEMBER 28, 1841.

DR. GODDARD, in the Chair.

The corresponding Secretary's report was read and adopted.

The committee on Mr. Haldeman's paper, "Description of